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ABSTRACT

This document examines emerging issues and opportunities for community-based organization (CBO) involvement in welfare reform. The document begins with a brief section of background information on past CBO involvement in helping families move from welfare to work. The next section answers policy questions pertaining to the following issues: (1) factors and specific legislation that have expanded opportunities for CBO involvement in welfare reform; (2) ways CBOs are serving low-income families who have left or are trying to leave welfare; (3) barriers CBOs confront in getting involved with welfare reform; (4) promising approaches CBOs can consider to overcome the barriers (including partnering with other organizations, enhancing data collection and reporting systems, and identifying sustainable funding sources); (5) opportunities for state and local policymakers to reduce barriers to CBO participation in welfare reform; and (6) ways CBOs can be involved as welfare reform evolves. Key findings of research on CBO involvement in welfare reform are presented. An innovative program serving 22 cities across the United States is profiled along with innovative programs in the following states: California; Louisiana, Pennsylvania; Nebraska; New

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York; Ohio; and Texas. Concluding the document are the World Wide Web addresses of nine resource contacts and sources for nine publications. (MN)

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WELFARE INFORMATION NETWORK

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Emerging Issues and Opportunities for Community-Based Organization Involvement in Welfare Reform

By Rebecca Brown

Background

Community-based organizations (CBOs), such as community action agencies and the local affiliates of Volunteers of America, the YMCA, Boys & Girls Clubs of America, and the Salvation Army, have always provided certain services to low-income children and families, particularly in the areas of child welfare and adoption, family preservation, special needs child care, transportation, and youth development. However, with the emphasis the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (PRWORA) of 1996 place on "work first" and the time limits it imposes on cash assistance, the impetus for CBOs to address additional family needs, such as career counseling, employment training, and job retention, has grown. CBOs are becoming integral partners in state and local governments' welfare-to-work and workforce development policy and planning processes and service delivery. As welfare reform progresses, it is likely that CBO involvement in providing work supports and services to low-income families will continue, if not increase.

This *Issue Note* examines the role CBOs have played and will likely continue to play in supporting families that have left or are taking steps toward leaving the welfare rolls. It describes some of the emerging challenges CBOs face as they vie for government contracts, improve their organizational capacity and accountability, and attempt to meet the needs of low-income families and, increasingly, hard-to-employ individuals. Finally, it discusses policy implications, offers program examples, and provides additional resources for state and local policymakers and CBOs as they make further decisions under welfare reform.

For more background information on the broad array of CBO strategies being implemented under welfare reform, see the Welfare Information Network's Community-Based Strategies and Faith-Based Involvement web sites at http://www.welfareinfo.org/collaboration.htm and http://www.welfareinfo.org/faithbase.htm, respectively.

Policy Questions

What factors and specific welfare reform and related legislation have expanded opportunities for CBO involvement in welfare reform? The welfare reform law's devolution of program authority to state and local governments, as well as its shift to a time-limited, "work-first" approach to cash assistance, are key driving forces for greater CBO involvement in welfare reform. Work first transformed the nature of the TANF eligibility worker's job from one of determining eligibility and cutting checks to one of counseling on career opportunities and providing wrap-around service planning. This welfare office culture change, in part, enables CBOs to offer more of the counseling and benefit planning services they have been providing to low-income families for years. Some of

the other provisions in TANF and related legislation that give CBOs more opportunity to participate in welfare reform include the following.

"Charitable choice" provision. Section 104 of PRWORA enables faith-based organizations (FBOs) to compete for state and federal welfare funds on the same basis as other social service providers. Although FBOs cannot use government funds for religious missions or to screen the religious backgrounds of potential clients, they can deliver publicly funded programs that contain religious messages. However, states opting to contract with FBOs must provide TANF participants with a secular program alternative should they choose not to seek services from the FBO. For more information, see the Welfare Information Network (WIN) publication "Frequently Asked Questions from State and Local Agencies about Involving the Faith Community in Welfare Reform," at http://www.welfareinfo.org/frequent.htm.

"Contracting out" of services by state and local welfare agencies. PRWORA also allows states to contract with other private providers, such as nonprofit organizations, for-profit consulting agencies, and community colleges, to determine eligibility and make use of contracts, certificates, or vouchers in providing services to eligible low-income clients. Some states have made their workforce development agencies responsible for welfare-related employment services, and many of those agencies have added the provision of welfare-to-work services to their existing contracts under the former Job Training Partnership Act. These factors, along with freezes in public-sector hiring in some states and growing political acceptance of privatization, have led to an expansion in contracting for welfare-related services (Yates, November 1998).

Increasingly, CBOs have received performance-based welfare-to-work contracts from state and/or local governments. The welfare reform law's work participation rate requirements, as well as financial bonuses for decreases in out-of-wedlock births and increases in job placement and retention prompted states to structure contracts that compensate providers based on their performance in achieving certain program outcomes.

Designation of CBOs as qualified recipients of Welfare-to-Work competitive grants. Administered by the U.S. Department of Labor, the Welfare-to-Work (WtW) competitive grant program identifies CBOs, local governments, and private industry councils as qualified applicants for these grants and emphasizes the importance of responding to community needs as families make the transition from welfare to work. Nearly 200 WtW competitive grants have been awarded to a single CBO or coalitions of CBOs to provide postemployment services to hard-to-serve welfare recipients and noncustodial parents. WtW formula grants awarded to states and local workforce investment boards (WIBs) may also be distributed to CBOs at state or WIB option. States are now requesting federal waivers to spend WtW funds for an additional two years. For more information on the WtW grant program, visit the web site of the U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration, at http://wtw.doleta.gov/.

How are CBOs serving low-income families who have left or are trying to leave welfare? In addition to child welfare, family preservation, and related services, CBOs are offering services more directly related to helping individuals achieve employment outcomes and meet basic needs. Some organizations, such as the Wildcat Service Corporation in New York City, operate job-readiness or "soft-skills" training programs that prepare clients to successfully adapt to workplace demands and responsibilities. Other groups sponsor mentoring programs in which welfare recipients pair up with a former welfare recipient, a colleague at work, or another individual who can help them pursue employment and training opportunities, manage their finances, improve their parenting skills, and find quality child care. Community development corporations and local chapters of Habitat for

Humanity are some of the CBOs that help low-income families secure affordable housing or obtain emergency assistance.

Some of PRWORA's provisions related to convicted drug felons, domestic violence, and the maintenance of two-parent families have also contributed to increased caseworker referrals to CBO-operated substance abuse and mental health treatment programs, domestic violence shelters, and fatherhood programs. The DeKalb Economic Opportunity Authority, Inc., a WtW competitive grantee and community action agency, partners with the DeKalb County Government, the public housing authority, the DeKalb College, Goodwill Industries of Atlanta, DeKalb County Chamber of Commerce, and other organizations to provide educational training, employment assistance, and substance abuse services to noncustodial fathers. For more information, contact Lois J. Burns, DeKalb Economic Opportunity Authority, Inc., 404/929-2500.

Other CBOs offer multiple services on-site to address family needs more holistically. For example, the SHIELDS for Families Project in Los Angeles is a community-based, non-profit organization that provides job training, substance abuse and mental health treatment, and child abuse and domestic violence services to low-income mothers and their children in order to address interrelated and cross-generational barriers simultaneously.

What are some of the barriers CBOs confront in getting involved with welfare reform? Many CBOs have proven track records in identifying and addressing the needs of low-income families, with some organizations having operated since the early nineteenth century. Nevertheless, CBOs face several challenges to participating in welfare reform given the multiple infrastructure needs of their organizations and PRWORA's strict requirements. For example, states must meet comprehensive TANF caseload data collection and reporting requirements, so the burden often falls on CBOs to collect the information and submit it to the state or county. Some CBOs, particularly small service providers do not have the data collection systems needed to track and report detailed information on each program participant and some cannot finance information system upgrades. The TANF block grant also gives states more flexibility to contract with CBOs than under the Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) program, and this flexibility has increased competition for government funds. Service providers with greater capacity and other financial resources to leverage are typically in a better position to win contracts, placing smaller CBOs at a disadvantage.

Limited staff and service capacity are other factors inhibiting CBO participation in welfare reform. Staff may be lacking in numbers, knowledge about welfare reform requirements, and requisite skills to meet the needs of certain low-income clients. For example, individuals with more serious barriers to employment may need specialized counseling and treatment services that cannot adequately be assessed and addressed by some CBOs, particularly those that rely heavily on lay volunteers to provide services. In other cases, CBOs do not have the space or facilities needed to serve additional clients or provide specialized services for the hard-to-employ.

CBOs may have difficulty providing services to low-income families under welfare reform because of a lack of sustainable funding. To remain effective and able to meet contract obligations, CBOs need access to long-term funding sources, as well as high-quality financial management and accounting systems. Some CBOs find they are less likely to secure grants and contracts if they fail to show funders they already have resources to leverage and match any new funding sources. Funders also often like to see positive program outcomes before renewing a CBO's contract or awarding it any new funds. This can be problematic, however, for programs that do not experience significant changes in client behavior or employment during the initial period of program implementation.

Program outcomes, whether they are positive or negative, may not materialize until the program has operated for a few years.

Finally, CBOs that lack a solid understanding of the political environment and relationships with key players also find it difficult to participate in welfare reform. CBOs that are used to working within traditional service provider networks must be willing to reach out to governments, businesses, and other nontraditional partners to become familiar with these groups' agendas as well as identify opportunities for collaboration.

What are some promising approaches CBOs can consider implementing to overcome these barriers? Given the barriers some CBOs face in participating in welfare reform, they may want to consider the following options.

- **Partner with other organizations to obtain the necessary expertise or specialized services for certain populations, such as hard-to-employ individuals.** Collaboration can also help CBOs expand their capacity for providing services and potentially broaden their delivery area. These partnerships, in turn, may give smaller CBOs a competitive edge for receiving government funds and other contracts.
- **Ensure staff understand TANF work requirements, time limits, and other restrictions that affect how they serve TANF participants.** Staff who are inadequately informed about the welfare reform policies of a state or county are less likely to meet performance contract measures, and they will be less effective in addressing client needs.
- **Enhance data collection and reporting systems and use the outcome data to improve the CBO's performance.** Such actions can improve the organization's ability to satisfy contract reporting requirements as well as improve service delivery for clients. Increasingly, CBOs are developing web sites to provide service and referral information. CBOs with less capacity for information systems management could hire a staff person who is specifically tasked with managing these databases.
- **Identify sustainable funding sources to ensure the CBO's solvency and help leverage interest among other funders.** Securing matching funds from community foundations and other private funders is one way CBOs can better position themselves to compete for state and local government contracts. Many national organizations representing CBOs also provide technical assistance to their members on fundraising strategies, board development, cultural competency, leadership development, and other areas that contribute to an organization's ability to raise capital.

What opportunities exist for state and local policymakers to reduce barriers to CBO participation in welfare reform? State and local governments that offer services to low-income families through CBOs may want to assess whether their policies inhibit current and potential contract arrangements. State and local policymakers may want to consider using these strategies to reduce barriers to CBO participation.

- **Allow CBOs to commingle and use state and federal funds in a more flexible way whenever this is permitted by state or federal law.** Policymakers may also want to streamline funding sources to ease CBOs' program management and data tracking burdens.
- **Offer, or continue to offer, grants to CBOs for welfare-related direct service and infrastructure-building activities.** State and local policymakers may want to provide grants for services and supports, as well as grants to help CBOs retrain staff, upgrade data collection and reporting systems and other organizational technology, and meet other capacity improvement needs.

- **Conduct special outreach efforts to inform CBOs of funding and other opportunities to serve low-income families.** State and local governments can identify gaps in service delivery and then, through direct marketing campaigns, community forums, and other activities, make CBOs aware of opportunities to fill those gaps.
- **Train CBO staff in TANF program requirements.** In many cases, state and local governments may be able to include CBO staff in existing government-sponsored training sessions to minimize duplication of effort and communicate standardized messages regarding TANF policies and procedures to all providers.

How can CBOs continue to be involved as welfare reform evolves? As states continue to implement welfare reform and assist low-income working families, there will likely be a steady need for CBO involvement in providing services that promote employee retention and advancement and target hard-to-employ individuals. States are gaining information from pilot programs they have implemented during the past few years and are considering options for spending TANF funds in light of these results and other factors. CBOs will continue to play a key role in delivering substance abuse and mental health treatment, domestic violence services, special needs child care, after-school programs, and long-term support services. Several studies suggest multiple employment barriers affect a considerable portion of both welfare "leavers," who may still be struggling to make ends meet, and TANF "stayers" who may still be experiencing problems in leaving the welfare rolls. CBOs also have a continued role to play in conducting outreach activities to ensure eligible families receive such employment supports as food stamps, Medicaid, and child care. States that received TANF high performance bonuses and financial awards for reducing out-of-wedlock births may want to consider using the new funds to support community-based service delivery.

States, the federal government, researchers, and other interested parties are also beginning to look ahead to the congressional reauthorization of the TANF program in 2002. Many CBOs and their national affiliates are now developing policy recommendations for reauthorization. Others are helping their members organize grassroots lobbying efforts and are tracking other CBOs' positions on TANF reauthorization [see the Low-Income Networking and Communications (LINC) project description under "Innovative Practices"].

Recent White House action will also likely provide additional opportunities for CBO participation in welfare reform. In January, President George W. Bush established an Executive Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives (OFBCI) and parallel branches of this office in five federal departments—Labor, Education, Health and Human Services, Justice, and Housing and Urban Development. OFBCI will "promote a policy of respect for and cooperation with religious and grassroots groups. It will identify barriers to such groups in federal rules and practices, propose regulatory and statutory relief, and coordinate new federal initiatives to empower and partner with faith-based and community-based problem-solvers." The president also released policy proposals designed to increase funding and reduce bureaucratic barriers for FBOs and CBOs. These proposals seek to allow non-itemizers to deduct charitable contributions from their federal income tax, expand charitable choice to include other federal programs, encourage states to create charitable tax credits, create a capital fund to expand FBO and CBO service capacity, and offer new competitive grants for specific social programs. For more information, see *Rallying the Armies of* Compassion (January 2001) at http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/reports/faithbased.pdf.

Research Findings

Research on CBO involvement in welfare reform tends to focus on assessing organizational capacity to provide services and the types of partnerships being formed among CBOs, government, and the private sector.

Launched in 1995, the **Annie E. Casey Foundation Jobs Initiative** is an eight-year demonstration project providing funding and support for community-based initiatives in six cities—Denver, Milwaukee, New Orleans, Philadelphia, St. Louis, and Seattle. The projects aim to help young, low-income workers find and advance in meaningful jobs and to identify national employment and training models. Part of the initiative involves providing technical assistance to CBOs to help them build organizational capacity. Following four years of program planning and implementation, some key lessons for CBOs include the following.

- Newly placed enrollees must be closely monitored and provided with support and followup services, including support groups and telephone calls, as well as financial, housing, and child care assistance, to ensure they stay on the job.
- CBOs must be provided with adequate financial support, technical assistance, networking opportunities, and other resources that enable them to design more effective, accountable, and outcomes-oriented programs.
- CBOs need funds that can be allocated quickly and efficiently so they can respond to employers' training and hiring needs in a timely manner.

For more information, visit http://www.aecf.org/jobsinitiative/.

The **Manpower Demonstration Research Corporation Project on Devolution and Urban Change** is tracking the implementation of welfare reform in four large urban counties—Cuyahoga (Cleveland, Ohio), Los Angeles, Miami-Dade, and Philadelphia—between 1997 and 2001. The project seeks to understand how state and local welfare agencies, poor neighborhoods, and low-income families are affected by the changes to the income support system in response to PRWORA. It includes an institutional study examining how new policies and funding mechanisms are affecting nonprofit organizations. Its most recent report includes early findings on welfare reform's impact on CBO involvement at the sites. For example, in Miami-Dade, the new local WAGES Coalition's performance-based contracts posed difficulties for smaller nonprofit service providers who could not maintain operations under the more demanding contract terms. Welfare reform in Los Angeles saw the emergence of CBOs to provide domestic violence and counseling services and substance abuse and mental health treatment, as well as their rise to become potentially important players in the policymaking process (Quint et al., April 1999). Results from the institutional study are expected in March 2001.

Researchers with **Indiana University** examined the impact of welfare reform on the receipt of social services from FBOs using data from Indiana's welfare reform evaluation. They also analyzed cross-sectional data from Indiana social service agencies; cases from faith-based and non-faith-based organizations were matched to compare how these two types of organizations were serving welfare recipients. Recipients seeking assistance from FBOs were more likely to be disadvantaged than those seeking services from CBOs—23 percent of FBO clients were sanctioned cases and 35 percent were individuals with disabilities. FBOs were also slightly less likely (29.1 percent) than non-FBOs (34 percent) to provide employment and educational services. However, the study's authors suggest this discrepancy could be because FBOs receive less public financial support than non-FBOs (Reingold et al., October 2000).

Innovative Practices

The **Annie E. Casey Foundation** also just launched a multi-year demonstration, **Making Connections**, in 22 cities across the United States. The project aims to stimulate and support a local movement that engages residents, civic groups, political leaders, grassroots groups, public and private sector leaders, and FBOs in efforts to transform disadvantaged neighborhoods into family-supportive environments. The project will focus on connecting low-income families to local labor markets, social networks, and services and supports to strengthen child and family well-being. It will also help sites improve their capacity to gather and use data to measure the effectiveness of their strategies and to advocate for community change. Initial program findings are expected in the next few years. For more information on Making Connections, visit http://www.aecf.org/.

California: The Neighborhood CIRCLES (Comprehensive, Integrated Resources for CalWORKS Limited-English Speakers) program in Oakland is an intensive welfare-to-work program for limited-English-speaking, culturally isolated welfare recipients. Five culturally-based organizations work with several resource agencies with ties to jobs, employment training, transportation, and child care resources to address the needs of different cultural groups within the community. It is also implementing a work experience component to ease the transition of some clients into the American workforce. CIRCLES grew out of a year-long collaborative planning process involving 35 CBOs and nearly 100 neighborhood welfare recipients from seven different language groups. Some of the partners include the East Bay Asian Local Development Corporation, Spanish Speaking Unity Council, Peralta Services Corporation, Laney College, Merritt College, Asian Community Mental Health Services, Alameda County Transit, and La Clinica de la Raza. Contact: Ruben Briones, Spanish Speaking Unity Council, 510/535-6932 or Helen Shor, East Bay Asian Local Development Corporation, 510/535-7173.

Louisiana and Pennsylvania: The Annie E. Casey Foundation Jobs Initiative sites in New Orleans, Louisiana, and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, involve CBOs in efforts to secure for their clients jobs with advancement opportunities and benefits. In New Orleans, employee referrals come from three community-based organizations—Citywide Tenants Group, an association of public housing tenants, and two faith-based coalitions, All Congregations Together and the Jeremiah Group—that identify and recruit participants from two public housing complexes. Program planners also brought together community-based organizations, public housing residents, businesses, and other stakeholders to devise a soft-skills training component of the job-readiness program. In Philadelphia, a similar effort uses CBOs with community connections to raise program funds and conduct program outreach and recruitment. For example, Philadelphia Interfaith Action, a coalition of more than 40 congregations, led an advocacy campaign to secure initial state job training grants and then additional funding from the state legislature. (For more information on the initiatives, see Gibson, 2000.) Contact for New Orleans: Darryl Burrows, Metropolitan Area Committee, 504/529-2600. Contact for Philadelphia: Margaret Berger-Bradley, Delaware Valley Community Reinvestment Fund, 215/925-1130.

Nebraska: The Nebraska Department of Health and Human Services uses TANF funds to contract with the Urban League of Greater Omaha to provide holistic case management services to 400 of its inner-city welfare-to-work clients. The Urban League's Network for Holistic Recovery program provides counseling; substance abuse and mental health referral and monitoring services; family functioning assessments; educational, career, and vocational testing; and other services. Street outreach and home visiting are used to encourage program participation and serve individuals in non-threatening environments. The program has also developed strong relationships with several specialized service providers to address issues such as substance abuse and domestic violence.

Contact: Thelma Simms, Director, Employment First Program, Urban League of Greater Omaha, 402/451-1066.

New York: The Welfare Law Center's Low Income Networking and Communications (LINC) project assists grassroots coalitions of current and former welfare recipients to communicate their social program improvement agendas to the public and one another via the Internet. LINC provides technical assistance to low-income organizing communities, including an introductory course on the Internet and online organizing; a moderated listserv with more than 150 advocacy organizations participating in such discussions as "how to use the media in an advocacy campaign"; and a web site (http://www.lincproject.org/) that houses different organizations' developments, newsletters, and publications. LINC published an online "Organizer's Toolkit" as well as launched a web site on welfare reform reauthorization that tracks the reauthorization-related activities of welfare advocacy organizations across the nation. Contact: Gina Mannix, Project Director, LINC, 212/633-6967.

Ohio: The Ohio Department of Job and Family Services administers the Prevention, Retention, and Contingency (PRC) program. The program provides nearly $700 million in TANF grants to all 88 counties to fund benefits and services for families with incomes at or below 200 percent of the poverty level; the benefits and services are not considered "assistance." The state developed a PRC model with program eligibility criteria, though counties may develop their own eligibility plan for PRC clients if they so choose. PRC enables counties to design services to best meet the needs of their local communities. Some of the services counties are providing under PRC include work subsidies, supportive services, refundable earned income tax credits, contributions to individual development accounts, counseling and case management, and transportation benefits. Most counties subcontract with CBOs and FBOs to provide services. Contact: Stan Sells, Ohio Department of Job and Family Services, 614/466-6282.

Texas: For fiscal 2000 and fiscal 2001, the Texas Department of Human Services awarded $7.5 million in TANF funds to 26 CBOs and FBOs to serve, on a cost-reimbursement basis, TANF recipients and individuals at risk of joining the welfare rolls. These Local Innovation Projects provide non-residential domestic violence services, substance abuse counseling, vehicle repair, clothing or uniforms needed for work, telephone utility deposits, relocation assistance, emergency housing needs, adult literacy and English-as-a-Second-Language classes, and services to youth in low-income families to encourage them to finish school, avoid pregnancy, and/or become employed. The University of Texas School of Social Work will conduct program evaluations of the 26 contracts. Contact: Bo Platt, Texas Department of Human Services, 512/438-3450.

For More Information...

RESOURCE CONTACTS

The Finance Project, 202/628-4200 or visit http://www.financeproject.org/

Annie E. Casey Foundation, or visit http://www.aecf.org/

Center for Community Change, Rich Stolz, 202/342-0567 or visit http://www.communitychange.org/

Coalition on Human Needs, Carrie Kilman, 202/223-2532 or visit http://www.chn.org/

Local Initiatives Support Corporation, 202/785-2908 or visit http://www.liscnet.org/

National Association of Community Action Agencies, Judy Mason, 202/265-7546 or visit http://www.nacaa.org/

National Association for State Community Service Programs, Julie Jakopic, 202/624-5850 or visit http://www.nascsp.org/

National Congress for Community Economic Development, Carol Wayman, 202/289-9020 or visit http://www.ncced.org/

National League of Cities, Institute for Youth, Education, and Families, Cliff Johnson, 202/626-3000 or visit http://www.nlc.org/IYEF.htm

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The Enterprise Foundation is hosting its 2nd Annual National Ready, Work, Grow conference in New York City at the New York Hilton on May 14 - 15.

The conference is designed mainly for job training and placement organizations at the grassroots level--and the goal of the conference is to give every attendee a wealth of very practical, hands-on tools that they can use to improve their recruitment/outreach, job placement, retention and career advancement services, get ahead of the WIA curve and other features.

All conference information can be downloaded from our web site (http://www.enterprisefoundation.org/).
You can also reach the conference hotline at 410/772-2760.

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